

object lesson, but his sufferings merit that ours should have a purpose, becoming a means of our salvation. His grace reaches into the very heart of our freedom whence arose the defect of sin.

You may, indeed, block the mouth of Hell for another, but you cannot desire damnation for the salvation of your brother. This is a strange perverted wish, denying to yourself, against the whole order of God's Providence, what you unavailingly will for another. Are you not preoccupied with your own love rather than with the good of your brother?

Contemplating the Passion there seems little reason to suppose that Christ's sufferings were mitigated because of his Godhead. In his Humanity he experienced fully all kinds of indignity and bodily pain heaped upon him by an apostate nation and an ignorant Gentile world, by prince and people, man and woman. In our Head we must see a sorrow unlike to ours, measured only by the magnitude of the task He undertook.

LOVE FOR GOD

BY

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Before treating of the means of obtaining love for God, it would be well to speak of the fruits and excellence of this love, that those who strive to gain it may know for what a precious jewel they labour and may be encouraged. For when it is won, we shall exclaim with the bride in the Canticles, "If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing" (*Cant.* 8, 7); and like the strong woman in the Proverbs of Solomon, we may taste and see that the traffic is good and be willing to pay what is asked of us. (*Prov.* 31.)

Let no one suppose that it is possible to say in a few words all that this virtue deserves for as St. Paul says, "The end of the commandment is charity" (*Tim.* 1, 5); for nothing that has been or might be written could exhaust the ocean of its grandeurs. Therefore we will only write briefly of how it excels all other virtues.

The first excellence of charity is that, speaking theologically, it is the queen of virtues and the greatest of them all. Faith, hope and charity, called the theological virtues, surpass all the rest, for they honour and regard God as the supernatural end of man and regulate his dealings with God though in different ways. For faith regards him as supreme truth, giving firm and complete credit to all he has revealed; hope looks upon him as the highest and supreme good, to which it endeavours to attain, helped by divine grace and good works. But charity gazes upon

him as the good beyond compare, worthy to be loved for what he is with a transcendent love. And as this is the most excellent way of regarding and honouring God, charity is a more noble virtue than faith or hope. For faith sees God obscurely, as though through a veil; hope looks upon him as a good that is arduous to obtain, that it does not yet possess but hopes to gain; and hope is mingled with some self-interest, as it seeks him for itself, that is, its own perfection and this classes it with what theologians term the love of concupiscence. But charity loves him with a pure, selfless affection, of which St. Bernard says: "Pure love satisfies the soul with need of naught else, with no thought of self-interest, for with such a love it possesses God within it, the disposition of such love being to maintain the senses in the thing that is beloved into which it unites and transports the lover, and so it is with the genuine love for God, as St. John says: 'God is charity: and he that abideth in charity abideth in God and God in him'." (*In I John*, iv, 15.) Such union with the supreme good, on account of its intimacy, causes charity to excel all the virtues, as St. Augustine says: "There is nothing greater than the charitable soul except that same Lord who gives it charity." (*August. Sermon, 44, de temp.*)

Hence as that deed excels which is performed from the best motive, namely, charity, or love for God, it will be the most meritorious of all actions. This does not oppose the special excellence of martyrdom which is most pleasing to God on account of the love it shows for him, without which it would not be a martyrdom but a fruitless torture, as St. Paul declares (I Cor. 13, 3): "If I should give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

The second excellence of charity is that not only does it excel all the virtues but it is also the final aim of all of them, and of all the divine commandments and counsels. And not only the divine Law, and Holy Scriptures, but all things created in heaven and earth are ordained for this same reason, the principal motive for their existence, showing man's obligation to love God, since for that he was formed by that same Lord, for that he lives, and for that the heavens, the earth, the sea, the air and all creatures serve him, so that his being is fruitless and in vain unless he performs this office.

The third excellence of charity is that not only is it the aim of all the other virtues, but their life, their soul and their perfection too. For as the body without the soul is a real body but lifeless, so the virtues if they lack charity, because good habits, though they may seem admirable, have neither life nor worth nor merit in God's sight with which to make satisfaction for sin or earning grace or heaven, though they may be useful in many other ways. The reason is that as the man is not acceptable to God, neither

are his actions; for no one need feel indebted for what does not affect him, nor need God reward any deed that is not performed for love of him.

This virtue may well be compared to the Son of God himself, for as no rational creature in heaven or on earth is pleasing to God save for the sake of his beloved Son, neither does any virtue or deed please him that is not associated and beautified by love of Him. As the root to the tree, the soul to the body, and the sun to the earth, so is charity to the heart of the Christian, as St. Paul testifies (I. Cor. 13, 1-3): "If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing," which proves that all the virtues and gifts that please God have their value from the charity that prompts them.

More than this: not only good deeds prompted by charity are acceptable to God, but even actions that are indifferent and natural to life when performed with charity. Without this, the gold of the virtues is dross and with it the most commonplace deeds become fine gold. As St. Augustine says (*Serm. 42, de temp. in fine.*), "Love and do what thou wilt; if thou art silent, be silent for love; if thou dost pardon, pardon for love; if thou dost punish, punish for love, for what is done for this love, merits in the sight of God. For what can be more divine than that which renders indifferent works divine?" I said that love is gold, but it is of such a sort that all it touches becomes gold. What would men not give for an alchemy by which they could turn all the metals into gold? Then how should we prize this virtue that turns lead and iron into gold—that is, which renders every action, however insignificant, deserving of eternal life?

Then as St. Paul directs, "Let all your things be done in charity" (I. Cor. 16, 14), or elsewhere, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do; do all to the glory of God" (I. Cor. 10, 31). For as there was nothing in Solomon's temple that was not covered with gold (III. Kings 6), so there should be nought in the living temples of our souls that is not overlaid with charity.

And not only does this virtue make indifferent actions good, but it also makes the virtues of our neighbours our own, as St. Gregory teaches: "Ours are also the virtues that we love in other people, though we cannot imitate them, for the lover derives some share of what he loves in his neighbour" (Greg. *Mor. III*). Then let the jealous reflect upon this great virtue of charity which

without any work of ours wins for us what others have worked for.

This virtue extends even farther, for through the love of God not only does it make our neighbour's goods our own, but even gives us a share in all that belong to Christ and his Church, that is the whole mystical body; for as it unites us with Christ, the Head, and with that body which is the Church, it is charity which causes us to partake of what they both possess, just as the health of the whole body benefits all its parts.

The fourth excellence of charity is that not only is it the life of all the virtues but it also arouses and stimulates them all, for it is that which urges them to perform their work and understand their task. For from love for God, if it is strong, comes a most fervent desire to please him and to do His holy will, and man, knowing that nothing so gratifies God as obedience to his commands and good deeds, at once tries to practise them in his service. As a wife who loves her husband dearly tries her best to please him in her home and her dress, so the soul longs whole heartedly to please its Bridegroom in every possible way; and knowing that this must be done by the virtues, she practises them with fervour. This shows the resemblance between charity and him whom it loves, for as he, being one and most simple in his essence has all things in perfection and power, so charity in a manner holds in its power and beneath its sway all the virtues, so that St. Paul attributes them all to it.

To make this clearer, let us imagine two trees: one of death, the other of life. Of the tree of death the root is original sin, which as theologians teach is a sin in actuality and all the sins in potentiality. The trunk is exaggerated self-love, the branches are the passions and disorderly desires, and the fruits are wicked actions. The root of the tree of life is the grace of the Holy Ghost, its trunk is charity, the branches are the virtues from which proceed good works and over which charity holds control, and the carrying out of God's commandments, for "Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13, 10). St. Gregory speaks to the same effect: "The love of God is never idle, it always does great things if it is true love and may therefore be compared to fire, the most active of the elements; for divine love, the more vehement and burning it is, the less rest does it take and the more it hastens to please the Beloved" (Greg. *Hom.* 30 in *Evan.*). St. Augustine declares: "It seems to me that the shortest and best definition of the virtue is to call it 'Love's proper order,' for the true order is to give to each thing its fair share of the affection it deserves, and no more" (St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. XV.).

Hence he who feels this love keeps due measure in all things as St. Augustine explains: "Charity is patient in adversity, tem-

perate in prosperity, holds control over the passions, is swift to do good, safe under temptations, generous in hospitality, cheerful among friendly companions and longsuffering with the treacherous" (Aug. *Serm. 39 de temp.*). Elsewhere he says: "Charity stands firm among those who injure it, does good to those who hate it, is meek with the angry, innocent when conspired against, undisturbed when truth is known, grieves over the sorrows of others and is zealous in the virtues" (Aug. *id paulo infra.*).

But it is better to hear this praise from the mouth of the Apostle: "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely: is not puffed up. Is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never falleth away" (I. Cor. 13, 4-8). St. Bernard gives an excellent commentary on this: "Charity does not fall away in adversities because it is long-suffering, nor does it avenge injuries for it is benign; does not grieve at its neighbours' prosperity for it is not jealous; is not disturbed by its conscience for it has done no wrong; is not elated by honours because it is not proud, nor daunted by contempt as it is not ambitious. It is not the victim of covetousness as it does not seek its own interests; nor do injuries provoke it to anger, for it is not wrathful; neither is it consumed by suspicion, for it thinks ill of nobody. It does not rejoice at others' sufferings for it has no sympathy with wickedness, and is not deceived by errors for it rejoices in the truth. Persecutions do not overcome it for it endures them, nor does incredulity affect it, for its faith is perfect; nor does despair overthrow it for it hopes for all things. Even death cannot slay it, for though the deeds of all the other virtues cease in heaven charity alone will never fail. Oh unconquerable virtue that overcame the Maker of all things, to whom they are subject, when overcome by love he made himself the opprobrium of men, discarded by the world! For his immense love for us prevented him, in his anger, from delaying to show us mercy, and he offered the life he loved to his enemies out of love for his friends." (St. Bernard, *Tract. de charitate, Cap. II de Fortitud. Amoris.*) These words alone of St. Bernard's suffice to inspire in our hearts the strong love that so many and such wonderful perfections contain.

We learn not only that this love for God is a spur for all the other virtues, but that it is a sword for every vice, for its desire to please God makes it strive for every virtue, and as it fears to offend him, it avoids the vices which alone anger him.

The fifth excellence of charity: though charity is so great a spur and aid for all the virtues it is so especially for a universal fortitude, which helps to bear the burden of all the rest. Fortitude is so closely connected with love for God that nothing in the

world is so strong, for it is divine love that undertakes great deeds, does not refuse hardships, faces dangers, strengthens the weak-hearted, spurs on transactions, and turns cowards into brave men, for it does not weigh difficulties by its reason but by its desires.

As effects naturally resemble their causes, so the greater the love for the end in view, the more strongly does it urge what will obtain this end. As water rises to the height from which it descended so fortitude is on a par with love as the weakest of animals will venture its life in defence of its young, regardless of its own danger. So in proportion to its strength, love for God produces fortitude. What else can be meant by the words of the Canticles, "Love is strong as death"?

REVIEWS

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS. Translated and Edited by Professor Allison Peers. In Three Volumes. Reprinted. (Burns Oates; 17s. 6d. each volume.)

The reprint of Professor Peers's authoritative translation of the works of St. John of the Cross at this particular stage of English thought has a particular significance. A less perceptive publisher might have shied at so large a call on his paper ration made by these three substantial volumes; but the time was ripe and the publishers judged it accurately. The desire for mystical writings has increased with every month of the war. At first it was only a superficial fashion to read about saints and the supernatural, but with the publication of Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence* and of the story of S. Bernadette by Franz Werfel, the desire deepened into a genuine interest. Many works of a mystical trend have been stimulating this interest; Professor Peers has himself published a widely read work on St. John of the Cross, *The Spirit of Flame*. But the time soon came when those whose interest had been roused and deepened should be led to the sources, and so in the midst of all the books about Carmelites the works of the Carmelite Doctor of the Church reappears in time, we hope, to dispel certain nascent heresies.

For a serious danger lies within this craze for the "spiritual," a danger perhaps illustrated by the increasing popularity of Spiritualism. Evidently the mystical movement is a compensatory reaction from the brutal realities of the material world of to-day, an escape from the horrors of bombs and battlefields. Men's senses have been filled with the harshness of war, and they search blindly for relief, for something soft to the touch, something sweet-sounding and colourful. They think to find this in mystical writings, in the realms of the "Spirit." But such an escape